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New documents reveal CIA ties to UW studies

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University of Wisconsin scientists conducted two experiments between 1959 and 1962 — one involving infectious disease and the other involving human behavior — that were secretly underwritten by the CIA, according to documents obtained by The Milwaukee Journal.

In one project, volunteers were recruited from a church group for what they were told was "research in personality." Half the volunteers — normal, well-adjusted individuals — underwent psychotherapy and were tested for personality changes.

The documents indicate that the CIA used the special expertise of the university in evaluating behavior-modification techniques and in understanding the disease process.

The researchers knew for whom they were working and the objects of the research, according to the documents, but the CIA sponsorship may have been kept from the university administration.

At least one and probably both of the projects apparently were financed through an innocent-appearing organization that was used to conceal the ultimate source of the money.

The documents were turned over to The Journal in response to a request under the federal Freedom of Information Act for information about CIA involvement with UW. Deleted from them are the names of those involved and the names of the specific places in which the experiments were conducted.

One project — for which \$4,160 was allocated for the period July 1, 1961, to Dec. 31, 1962 — sought to determine the difference, if any, between strains of a disease-causing bacteria as they affect animals and humans.

The research design called for bacteriologists to study staphylococci bacteria obtained from boils in humans, mastitis in cows, arthritis in chickens and bladder infections in mink.

The other project — for which \$8,750 in CIA money was authorized on Aug. 11, 1959 — studied personality changes in normal persons and in schizophrenics, 24 persons altogether, during at least six months of psychotherapy.

The reasons for the CIA interest in such basic research is a matter of speculation. The documents offer only cryptic clues.

The projects were part of a series of what were called MK-ULTRA experiments that were conducted in the 1950s and early 1960s.

As has been gradually learned in recent years, MK-ULTRA was the code name for 149 human-behavior experiments that included giving mind-altering drugs such as LSD to unsuspecting human subjects.

The MK-ULTRA experiments and similar projects have since been repudiated by the CIA as inappropriate in that the testing was done on subjects kept in the dark about key elements of the research.

Cold War recalled

A CIA spokesman told The Journal that the MK-ULTRA experiments "continue to present a problem for us in that, when we think we've turned up all the records, some more turn up."

He said many of the experiments now appear to have been misconceived, but he added by way of explanation:

"It's impossible to re-create the climate of the Cold War period."

The bacteria study may have been of interest to the CIA for its possible applications to biological warfare. A specific aim of the project, according to one document, was to determine whether the strain of staphylococcus that causes infection in humans is the same as the strain that affects dogs.

Referring to the bacterial study, a CIA memo of Dec. 22, 1959, calls the work, termed MK-ULTRA Subproject 105, "an important fundamental investigation which can lead to an increased understanding of the process of pathogenesis [the production or development of a disease]."

Researcher was cleared

The names of all parties involved are purged from the memo, but it includes this cryptic note:

"Dr. [name crossed out] is cleared through SECRET and is aware of the true purpose of the program."

A document signed more than two months later consists of a grant proposal, but much of the information has been crossed out. It may have been written by the researcher, at the CIA's suggestion, to a foundation through which CIA money was passed. Thus, it could have been possible for the CIA to conceal its role from the university.

The documents on the psychotherapy study include a similar internal CIA memo. This one is more explicit about the covert nature of the study. The project's purpose, it says, is to "provide a mechanism for evaluating certain techniques of influencing human behavior that may have agency significance."

The memo calls the \$8,750 grant "supplemental" and says CIA support "will make it possible to have continued free access to the project and, when applicable, use the facility for consultation and support."

The memo says the project — MK-ULTRA Subproject 97 — was financed through an unnamed agency "for security and cover purposes."

The memo later refers to "the Society" as the funding agent. This probably was a reference to the Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology Inc., a foundation that issued grants to universities without identifying the CIA as the source of the funds.

The memo suggests that UW officials were unaware of CIA involvement when it says:

"Prof. [name withheld] holds a covert agency clearance and is witting of sponsorship; all others are unwitting."

Both experiments have the look of legitimate research such as might be financed by any scientific foundation and written up for later publication in a scientific journal.

The design of the study suggests a legitimate research interest in the effects of psychotherapy on acute and chronic schizophrenics. It is unclear from the proposal, however, why it was necessary, other than to create a control group, that well-adjusted, normal people were to undergo psychotherapy.

An item under "significance of the investigation" offers a hint. It says the experiment will address the problem of "therapy for the individual who does not consciously wish therapy or consciously resists it." Such therapy may be related to brainwashing.

Couples' club used

The psychology study identifies three sources of "normals" to be used in the study: "a local church couples' club," "a general hospital personnel list of low-income employees," "references from rural social-work agents."

In recruiting well-adjusted people selected to undergo psychotherapy, the